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ABSTRACT

Identifying and defining Ohio's migrant population, the document also seeks to destroy many of the myths that exist about migrant workers. The survey, made in September 1972, found that 90% of the state's 35,000 workers were Spanish speaking. The document also gives information on migrant recruitment, crew leaders, income, housing, crops, religion, bilingualism, health, Mexican immigrants, and the migrant's contributions to the economy. Ten misconceptions about migrant life are corrected, such as beliefs that "migrants are carefree and like to travel" and "migrants are adequately protected by state and Federal labor laws". (KM)

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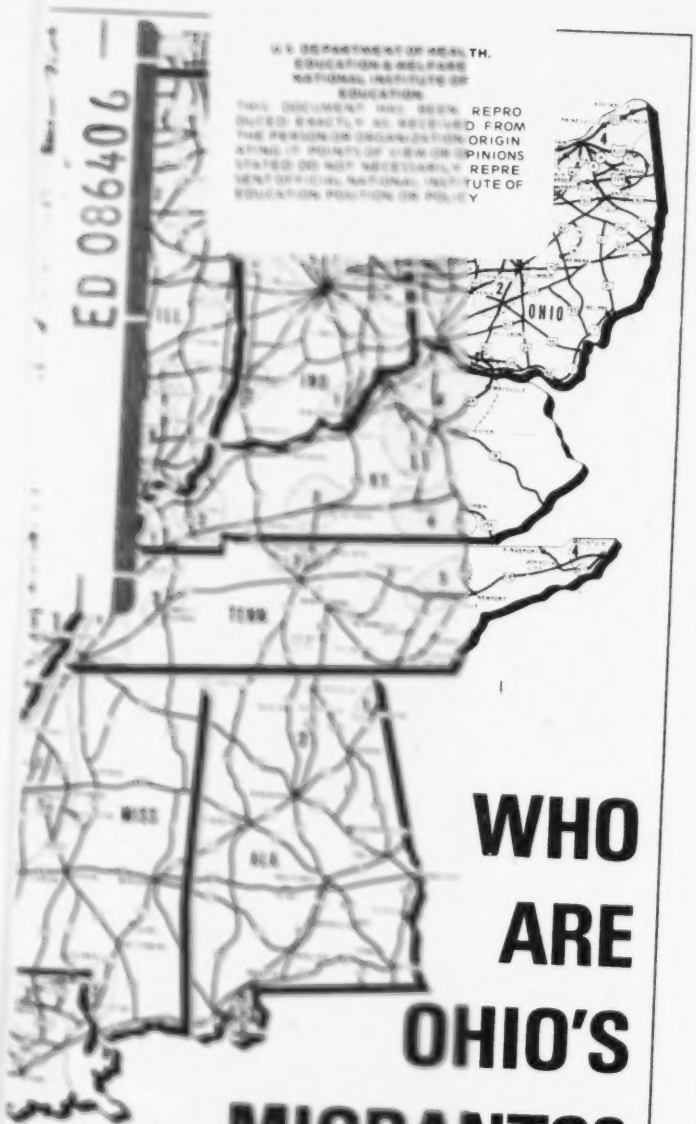

WHO ARE OHIO'S MIGRANTS?

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WHO ARE OHIO'S MIGRANTS?

FALLACIES AND FACTS ABOUT NORTHWEST OHIO'S FARMWORKERS

During World War II, Ohio began for the first time to depend on large numbers of out-of-state help in the growing and harvesting of its crops and in the processing of food in its canneries. Migrant workers, as the name suggests, are those who travel from one area of the country to another throughout the year, following the rotations of the crops from the south to the north.

In the summer and fall season of 1972, approximately 35,000 workers came to Ohio. They were employed primarily in the Northwestern area.

Who are they? Most Ohio migrants, about 90%, are Spanish speaking Americans, sometimes called Chicanos. There are also Puerto Ricans, Jamaicans, Appalachians and southern Negroes. Fifteen Northwest Ohio counties employ most of the migrant workers although the Ohio Department of Health listed 503 labor camps in 30 counties in 1973.

The Ohio Bureau of Employment Services separates the farm workers into **permanent** migrant workers who travel from state to state, mostly from Texas to the Midwest to Florida and then back to Texas; **seasonal** farm workers who come from Texas for five or six months, perhaps stopping in Wyoming or Nebraska to "block beets" (hoe and thin by hand) for a month; and **temporary** farm workers who come for shorter periods, or Ohio residents, mostly Mexican Americans, who also do summer field work. The seasonal workers, the largest group, constitute approximately 75% of the migrant work force.

Principal Northwest Ohio crops are tomatoes, pickles (cucumbers) and sugar beets which migrants plant, cultivate and harvest.

New workers are usually recruited in Texas by a Mexican American crew boss or contractor hired by the grower or processor to transport, oversee and pay the crew. Several thousands are recruited under the Annual Worker Plan conducted through mutual clearance arrangements of the Ohio State and Texas State Public Employment Services with employment services in other states cooperating to use workers before and after their work in Ohio.

Migrant crew leaders may not know about available agencies or services. Oversupply of labor makes migrants reluctant to ask for more money or better housing. Because some workers know little or no English, the opportunity exists for the crew boss or employer to take advantage of them.

In a two county Hintz survey conducted in September 1972, covering 37 families, 285 individuals working in 13 camps, the following data were received: Just half were under 35 years of age; the family size ranged from no children through 15, with a mean of 5.7, making an average family of over seven. Fifty-nine percent had been migrants for four or fewer years and the rest for five through seventeen years. The mean number of years for coming to Ohio was 5.4. The number of months in Ohio ranged from one to eight with the mean four months, depending upon their employment. Only one was a permanent migrant with no home base. Sixty-five percent worked only in Ohio and returned to Texas; thirty-five percent worked in one or more other states, and two families worked part of the winter in Florida. Thirty percent had no winter work in Texas; seventy percent had winter employment, but seventy-four percent of these were part time jobs. All winter work was field work or in processing plants except for a few odd jobs.

Seventy-three percent own or are buying their home; twenty-seven percent are renting or living with others.

Ninety percent are Catholic and ten percent are Protestant. Church participation in Ohio was low.

Almost thirty percent, mainly adults, spoke no English; thirty-five percent were bilingual but unable to write English; thirty-five percent were literate in both languages.

The two top estimated incomes yearly were $7200 for families with ten and eleven children. The thirteen low incomes were estimated $400 to $1500 for families with zero to ten children. The average family income for total summer work in Ohio was $1850. For the families who had winter work, the average Texas winter income was $980. Jobs harvesting Texas crops often yield $5 to $6 a day. Work in packing sheds is $1.60 an hour with $40 a week as the usual amount when work is available. Mean income for families returning to Ohio for five to seventeen years was $493 per month in summer; and $398 per month for the first through fourth years. Years of experience do not increase earning power. Increases come only with more child labor and the ability of older children to pick more. Earnings have not kept up with the increased cost of living.

The survey was made in late September 1972 and does not include the more transient, poorer families who come in July to pick cucumbers for a short time and then move on.

FALLACY 1—*Migrants are Carefree and Like to Travel*

FACT: The popular myth is that migrants are a happy group of people contented with their lot in life and, like gypsies, they like to travel continuously. Here are representative views of young and old Mexican Americans.

"We don't travel for kicks. We'd like to stay in Texas."

"Nobody enjoys moving and missing school."

"If we didn't smile, we wouldn't get jobs."

"We are so used to travelling, we don't know any way to get out of it."

"We can't get jobs in Texas most of the time."

"It's the Anglos (white Americans) who say we like to move about."

"We have to take backroads along the way. Gas stations don't like us using their toilets."

Even in the face of adversity, however, migrant families are still able to joke about depressing things like leaky roofs and lack of heat. If they didn't laugh, they surely would cry.

FALLACY 2—*Migrants Should Go Back to Mexico Where They Belong*

FACT: Most of these migrants are Americans of Mexican descent, from marriages between Indians and the Spanish conquistadores. Texas and the other southwestern states became part of the United States in 1848, at the signing of the Treaty of Hidalgo Guadeloupe. The history of this Hidalgo treaty shows duplicity on the part of the United States. There is bitterness among knowledgeable Mexican Americans because of this and because they are treated like outsiders.

The Mexican legal "green carders" (those with short term work permits) and the illegal "wetbacks" are recruited on entry, usually into Texas, by American firms and growers. Some recruiting is done by Mexican Americans upon the request of would-be employers. Mexican American Texans get approximately twice as much for picking a hamper of onions as the Mexican National. The cheap labor competition tends to force Texans to travel north. Meanwhile, the employers may hire "wetbacks" for a short time and then turn them over to the immigration authorities, sometimes without paying them. Employers rarely pay fines for such tactics.

FALLACY

FALLACY 3—*Migrants Should Stay in Texas or Why Doesn't Texas Take Care of Them?*

FACT: Mexican Americans leave Texas to do farm labor because there is little summer work in Texas. Year round work in factories is not available to many Mexican Americans there.

Four counties in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas (Hidalgo, Starr, Cameron, and Stacy) have a total of approximately 100,000 residents who leave the state for migrant farm work. In addition, 200,000 others leave the Valley to work in the Texas cotton gins and in the ranch and farm fields. The median annual income in Hidalgo county for the Mexican American family is $3,957. Seventy-nine percent of Hidalgo County is Mexican American.

The Texas vegetable and citrus agribusiness is monopolized by a few families and corporations who own the land, set the prices, and own the packing sheds which provide intermittent work. They also dominate the trucking and marketing, thereby controlling the small vegetable farmer and the laborer.

FALLACY 4—*Migrants Have Good Homes in Texas*

FACT: The Texas Good Neighbor Commission Report of 1971 states that the migrant housing ranges from extremely bad to good. It depends on what income the family receives and whether they live in town or in one of the 100 rural subdivisions called "colonias." Eighty percent of the latter lack sewage disposal and have inadequate vermin control. Their only source of water is that from polluted irrigation canals or shallow wells. Water Districts collect water taxes, but there is no representation for the Mexican Americans who, in many communities, are not receiving any water.

The crew boss families and those with many children who have been in the migrant stream many years have acquired adequate houses in towns which they then improve bit by bit.

FALLACY 5—*Migrants are Here Only a Short Time. They Don't Need Better Housing.*

FACT: Federal and Ohio housing and sanitation requirements are minimal. Even then, some growers resent these regulations and do not fully comply. Enforcement of standards by local and state inspection is infrequent and not uniform.

Too many migrant accommodations include overcrowding, uncollected garbage, lack of hot water in communal laundries, showers and sinks, unsanitary toilet rooms and privies, leaky roofs, and dirty and tattered mattresses. Government regulations do not require water in living quarters. Almost all workers haul in cold water for cooking, drinking and washing.

These conditions in turn affect the well-being and morale of families. Physical and psychological damage to growing children is unavoidable where there is little or no privacy for parents or children during their average four month stay in Ohio. This is not a short time.

The Ohio Department of Health, in 1972, the latest available figures, inspected 652 agricultural labor camps in the state. Of these, 561 were in the Northwest area. Violations of state regulations in inspected camps were found as follows:

Housing (overcrowding and construction)	81%
Fire and Safety	75%
Toilet Facilities	74%
Screening	65%
Bathing, Laundry, Handwashing Facilities	59%

There appears to be an improvement in 1973 as the result of efforts by the Ohio Department of Health.

FALLACY 6—*Migrants Receive Free Housing and Many Fringe Benefits*

FACT: The main reason migrants receive "free" housing, is so the farmer will be able to obtain their services, as the workers have no accommodations of their own. Usually the migrant workers' housing, electricity and water supply are without cost to them, although in a few situations varying amounts of rent and bottled gas costs are charged.

However, migrants do not have many fringe benefits which most factory or salaried workers take for granted: hospitalization and surgery insurance, retirement funds, credit union and saving benefits, and opportunities for wage increases.

Migrants questioned in the January 1970 Howell, Erven, and Bottum survey of the Ohio Agricultural Research Center at Wooster stated that benefits they would like are: life and health insurance coverage, money for transportation to Ohio, payment of all wages as work is performed, and toilet facilities in the field. Replies made in another 1973 study by Hintz, included these and also interest in unionization.

FALLACY

FALLACY 7—*Migrants Don't Try Hard Enough to Help Themselves or "We Were Poor But We Made It."*

FACT: Migrants are not lazy; there is simply little income paid for the often backbreaking labor they do and the long hours they work. Mostly they feel boxed-in. Some migrants 35 years of age or older have bettered themselves, but it hasn't been easy. They improve their homes and buy trucks which are needed for transportation across 2500 miles of America's farm lands and provide a little extra income hauling farmers' crops to the food processor.

Educational achievement is low, as 58% of the migrants are functional illiterates with an adult average grade level of two to four. Children today are going to school more; however, of the Texas Valley workers, who constitute 80% of those who come North, 65% drop out before they finish the sixth grade. Some children are placed in slow learner classes because of language difficulties, not because of lack of intelligence. Resident Mexican Americans are often channeled into vocational schools and the result is that few have professional futures. There are not enough bilingual teachers, nurses and social workers.

Prejudice operates in subtle ways to discourage upward mobility: overcharging for goods and services, refusal to lend mortgage money, discrimination in employment opportunities.

FALLACY 8—*Migrants are Well Paid (They Make up to $100 a Day and We've Heard up to $12,000 a Year)*

FACT: Three separate studies show an average Ohio summer income of approximately $2055 per family. The only Ohio migrant study showing yearly income indicates $2792 as the average. The range of income per family is from several hundred dollars to a top of $7500 for the year. Thirty percent of the families had no winter work in Texas. Families earn the most during the peak harvesting time and work long hours then, but during other times the work is sporadic and irregular. Difference in income range is accounted for by the size of the family unit, the number of months of work in Ohio, the weather, quality of crop, and size of the crop. Work is not continuous and is paid for at different rates per crop and by employer.

A Michigan (1969) survey of 10,080 migrants stated only 2.7% (373 families) grossed an annual wage of $7000 and over. These may have been crew bosses or large families.

FALLACY 9—*Migrants are Adequately Protected by State and Federal Labor Laws*

FACT: Migrants are excluded from the provisions of the National Labor Relations Act, which extends legal guarantees to industrial workers to bargain collectively. There are no known written contracts for field workers.

Migrants do not receive unemployment compensation for field work.

Although farm workers in Ohio are covered by workmen's compensation, not many are informed of this.

Minimum wage laws provide a lower rate per hour, $1.30, for farm work than the $1.60 paid for other labor.

State law requires workers to be paid every two weeks. However, a so called "bonus" of two or more cents per hamper of tomatoes is held back from migrant workers' wages until the end of the season. This forces families to remain when pickings are poor, or forfeit a substantial part of their earnings.

FALLACY 10—*Migrants are Healthy From all the Outdoor Work*

FACT: Many factors combine to make agricultural work one of the three most hazardous occupations, along with construction and mining.

Figures covering the migrant population in Northwest Ohio, 1973, show that of those who received medical treatment:

25.9% were treated for diseases of the respiratory system

11.1% were for diseases of the digestive system, including dental problems

10.3% nervous system and sense organ diseases

9.7% infective and parasitic diseases, including T.B.

8.9% skin and subcutaneous tissue disorders

While skin diseases rank last for the general population, they are fifth for Ohio's migrants. Extremes of high and low temperatures, exposure to the sun's rays, sensitization to dust and pollen and exposure to toxic chemicals in herbicides and pesticides all contribute to these poor health conditions.

Although national life expectancy is 70 years, the migrant's expectancy is only 49 years. High male mortality occurs age 15 through 44 and high infant mortality from birth to four years.

A congressional committee in 1967 found:

Infant and maternal mortality rates are both 125% of the rate for Anglos; influenza and pneumonia are twice as prevalent among migrants as non-migrants; T.B. and other infectious diseases are 260% higher and accidents are 300% higher.

According to a 1972 newsletter by La Raza Unida de Ohio, seldom mentioned is the contribution the migrant himself makes to the state's economy. He harvested $20,000,000 worth of tomatoes and $3,600,000 worth of pickles. The migrant spends 60% of his earnings in the community near his camp. If the migrant paid the sales tax on the money he spent, he contributed at least $160,000 of his own money to the state.

Agencies report the numbers of migrants they have served, but they rarely state the value of these services to Ohio and its citizens. The Ohio Department of Education received over $960,000 in federal monies for migrant schools, 69% of which was for wages and salaries. The Ohio Department of Health clinics are funded with 80% federal dollars and 20% local services "in kind" or cash. Food stamps are federal dollars which must be spent on domestic food items and these dollars go to local grocers and to the farmer. The Employment Service invests in "man years" about $490,000 in assistance to migrants and growers.

Not mentioned by La Raza Unida de Ohio, but obvious, is that all migrants, through depressed wages and poor living and working conditions have subsidized low food costs for the nation's consumers.

The Elizabeth S. Magee Education and Research Foundation has initiated and supported various migrant programs. This booklet was written by Mrs. Joy Hintz, B.S., B.A. with the assistance of John Mecartney, Ph.D. and many other experts.

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